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Washington Report
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Congressman, 24th District

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FUNERAL INDUSTRY REFORMS NEEDED

True, many funeral directors and morticians are decent and honorable people. Certainly, in Los Angeles, some members of the funeral industry are prominent in philanthropic and community activities. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that the industry as a whole, is guilty of serious abuses. Consumers rights are often ignored.

Last year the Federal Trade Commission proposed a set of new rules to protect consumers from fraud and unfair manipulation by undertakers. I strongly supported these rules and was very sorry to see the vote in Congress went against them.

In considering funeral industry abuses, the first thing we must remember is that the consumer is in the worst possible position. He or she has just suffered a death in the family. Funeral and burial arrangements must be made quickly. No one wants to appear to have been stingy in attending to the last rites of a close family member. Unscrupulous morticians exploit the guilt, sorrow and confusion by which the grieving person is beset.

Some morticians deliberately conceal lower priced caskets and present to customers only moderate and high priced items. Others include in their final bill goods or services which the family never requested.

One of the most reprehensible practices in the funeral industry is to sell a consumer goods or services on the pretext that it is "required by law." The state or local laws alluded to usually do not exist. A similar ploy is reference to "cemetary regulations" to

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